December 5, 2001

Dear Friends,

We originally planned to get this issue of Muste Notes *out to you in mid-September. After the Twin Towers came crashing down on September 11, we had to adjust some deadlines. Our first priority, after determining that all our families, friends and associates were unharmed, was to get quick support to grassroots groups getting out anti-war messages amid an overwhelmingly pro-war media onslaught. Many were ad hoc coalitions, thrown together in the wake of the crisis. More established foundations might have passed them up—and in any case, their needs were immediate, and couldn't be fit into a regular grantmaking timeline.*

But these groups were doing urgent work: organizing teach-ins, vigils, marches and rallies; gathering signatures on petitions; handing out leaflets on street corners—in short, doing everything they could to raise their voices against the horrors of war and retaliation. So we put some other priorities on hold—like this newsletter—and put our September 11 Emergency Grant Program into action (see page 3).

We hope each of you has survived the current crisis relatively unscathed—physically, emotionally and economically. And we hope you will continue—and if possible, increase—your support of the Muste Institute. As civil liberties and dissent are increasingly threatened, the movement of nonviolent resistance to war and hatred will need our ongoing assistance.

Yours in peace,

Murray Rosenblith

Murray Rosenblith
Executive Director

MUSTE NOTES

News from the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute

VOL. 9, NUMBER 1 FALL 2001

Healing the Wounds of Murder

Conference brings victims' families together

From June 7 to 10, hundreds of people gathered at a special conference in Massachusetts, organized by Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation (MVFR). The Muste Institute helped support the conference with a December 2000 grant of $10,000 from our special donor-directed Sheilah's Fund East (which directs most of its grants to Latin American nonviolence work). The report below is by MVFR writer-in-residence Susannah Sheffer.

He stood in front of the audience, gripping the sides of the podium, and began talking about his 10-year-old son Jeffrey, who was murdered four years ago. He told about the two men who had stolen Jeffrey's bike so that they could lure him into their car with the promise of a new one. He told how the men had offered Jeff $50 to have sex with them. "And my Jeff said no," this father told the audience, an anguished pride in his voice. He told about Jeff's murder, the agony of getting the news, the rage he felt at the two killers when they were caught and convicted.

The people in the audience were entirely with him, nodding and crying. This was a conference of people who had lost family members to murder, so the pain Robert Curley was describing was all too familiar. The conference sessions had been full of stories like his.

"When Jeffrey was murdered," Robert was saying, "I wanted the men who killed him dead. I led the fight to reinstate the death penalty in Massachusetts." The Massachusetts folks in the audience remembered this well. In 1997, death penalty legislation in this state came as close to passing as it ever had. In fact, it *did* pass by one vote, and then one Representative changed his mind. And death penalty abolitionists remembered the way that the Curley family, in their raw grief, had been held up as indicators of why reinstatement of the death penalty made sense.

"But time passes," Robert went on to say to the conference audience, "and you start to see things a little differently. I learned more about the death penalty, some of the problems with it, and I changed my mind. But I didn't feel like coming forward, because I was tired of all the media attention. For some reason," he said, looking out at the silent and attentive people in the auditorium, "I decided a couple of days ago that I was ready to speak out about this. I called up a reporter and talked to her, and then yester-

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PHOTO BY MURRAY ROSENBLITH

On Sept. 13, the Muste Institute and War Resisters League sought the help of two young volunteers from the nearby Catholic Worker house to paint a banner for the top of the Muste building at 339 Lafayette Street. The banner reads "an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind," a version of the famous quote attributed to Gandhi. It went up on the south side of our roof, facing Bleecker Street, on Sept. 17. Volunteers at the Nicaragua Solidarity Network helped put on the grommets and secure the banner to the roof railing so it could withstand the elements. More than two and a half months later, the banner remains in place, its message clearly visible to the thousands of people who pass through the neighborhood each day. It even seems to have become a favorite tourist snapshot.

Healing the Wounds

Continued from page 1

day I opened the paper and saw that there was this conference going on at Boston College of murder victims' family members who oppose the death penalty. I almost fainted! I couldn't believe this was happening right now. So here I am, and I don't even know how the rest of my family feels about it, but I guess I'll find out later, because today would have been Jeffrey's 14th birthday and we're all going out to the cemetery. But I know I feel a lot better now. I feel a weight has been lifted off my shoulders."

By this time the audience was on its feet, crying, giving Bob Curley a standing ovation. This was the third day of the conference and it would have been hard to believe things could get any more moving, any more powerful, but here it was: a stunning example of a man's journey from fighting to reinstate the death penalty to speaking out against it.

Murder victims' family members who oppose the death penalty know that they're in the minority and that they don't fit the expected paradigm. They know an assumption exists in the United States that people who have lost a loved one to murder want and need the death penalty in order to heal. It's an assumption routinely made by legislators, prosecutors, victims' service personnel – even, sometimes, death penalty abolitionists, who too often frame the argument in terms of the person on death row and fail to acknowledge victims' needs or the possibility that victims' families, too, might oppose state killing.

This is why the "Healing the Wounds of Murder" conference, the first national gathering of murder victims' families opposed to the death penalty, was such an important and historic occasion. Hosted by the national organization Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation, in collaboration with Boston College, the conference brought together victims' families from all around the country (including families of the executed), abolitionists, lawyers, social workers, members of the clergy, and academics to talk about healing in the aftermath of murder and to challenge the assumption that all victims' families want more killing done in their names.

There were talks by Sister Helen Prejean, Bud Welch (whose daughter Julie Marie was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing), Arun Gandhi, James Gilligan. There were workshop sessions, led by victims' families, on such topics as "Do I Have to Forgive?", "Effective Victim Involvement in Death Penalty Cases," "Victim-Offender Mediation," "When the Death Penalty Divides Families and Communities," "Prosecutors and Murder Victims' Families: Beginning a Dialogue," and "Families of the Executed: The Hidden Victims." Gatherings of affinity groups enabled people with specific concerns – families of law enforcement, families of the executed or imprisoned, families in which one member killed another – to meet and talk. There were also several sessions specifically for political organizing and strategizing.

Coming as it did on the eve of the execution of Timothy McVeigh, with the American people focused on the first federal execution in two generations, the MVFR conference was both an oasis and a powerful counter-message to the widely held belief that the best response to violence is more violence, more killing. Celebrating MVFR's 25th anniversary, the conference gathered victims' family members in a collective expression of the belief that founder Marie Deans summarized so well: "From experience, we know that revenge is not the answer. The answer lies in reducing violence, not in causing more death. To those who say society must take a life for a life, we say: 'not in our name.'"

—Susannah Sheffer

NEWS FLASH

The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It, a documentary about US conscientious objectors during World War II, is scheduled to air nationally on PBS stations on January 15, 2002, at 10pm (check your local listings). The documentary was produced by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Tejada-Flores, and is distributed by the Independent Television Service (ITVS). The Muste Institute supported the project with two grants and a fiscal sponsorship.

PHOTO BY DAVE POWELL

September 11, 2001, around 10:15am: Muste Institute Executive Director Murray Rosenblith (far right) stands on the roof of 339 Lafayette Street as the north tower of the World Trade Center burns in the background. The south tower had already fallen. With Murray, from left, are Tom Poole, executive director of Deep Dish TV; Asif Ullah, War Resisters League staffperson in charge of ROOTS (formerly known as YouthPeace); and Melissa Jameson, director of WRL's national office. The photo was taken by Dave Powell, an organizer at Met Council on Housing, our newest tenant group. A short time after this shot was snapped, the second tower fell.

September 11 Emergency Grant Program

ALBUQUERQUE PEACE & JUSTICE EDUCATION PROJECT

Albuquerque, NM: $500.

Formed after September 11, this project's first teach-in and rally was attended by 800 people, prompting organizers to make it a regular Friday event. They are continuing to organize teach-ins, forums, vigils, marches, demonstrations, leafleting and other outreach actions in the Albuquerque area.

ANN ARBOR AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR PEACE

Ann Arbor, MI: $500.

Soon after Sept. 11, this group of activists began leafleting at the local farmers' market each Saturday. The Committee published a call for peace, signed by more than 770 people, as a full-page ad in the local paper. The group is now organizing a march and will send a large New Year's "card" to President Bush, filled with anti-war messages from community members.

ARIZONA ALLIANCE FOR PEACEFUL JUSTICE

Gilbert, AZ: $500.

This Phoenix area anti-war coalition, formed after Sept. 11, held a successful rally on Oct. 20 and helps coordinate Women in Black vigils and leafleting every Wednesday outside the public library. A regular Monday vigil will start on Dec. 10, and educational events are planned for January around Martin Luther King day.

BEYOND TUESDAY ALLIANCE

Athens, GA: $500.

Since coming together in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, this coalition of student and community-based groups has held four public roundtable events on the University of Gerogia campus, each drawing about 200 people. The events addressed the response to Sept. 11, historical background of the Middle East, civil liberties and the media.

COALITION FOR WORLD PEACE

Los Angeles, CA: $500.

The Coalition for World Peace sponsored its first vigils on Sept. 16 and 20, each drawing between 200 and 400 people. Since then members have been distributing over 2,000 flyers a week in the Los Angeles area. On October 27, the Coalition co-sponsored an anti-war rally in Pershing Square attended by 3,000 people.

IDAHO PEACE COALITION

Boise, ID: $500.

The Idaho Peace Coalition formed after September 11 and has organized several vigils, distributed hundreds of leaflets, formed a study group, and produced and distributed yard signs with a message for peace. Recently the Coalition sponsored a fast—accompanied by midday vigils and leafleting—to draw attention to the dire situation of the Afghani people.

KNOXVILLE AREA COALITION FOR COMPASSION, JUSTICE & PEACE

Knoxville, TN: $500.

This group formed on Sept. 19 and quickly organized several demonstrations and meetings. On Oct. 15 several Coalition members were arrested for hanging an anti-war banner over the I-40 interstate. The Coalition co-sponsored a day-long teach-in on Nov. 14 attended by over 600 people at the University of Tennessee Knoxville campus. The group holds vigils on campus every Friday and plans public forums for January.

NEW JERSEY PEACE ACTION

Montclair, NJ: $300.

On Sept. 21, NJ Peace Action launched its "Justice Not War" campaign with vigils in Morristown, Montclair, Newark, Jersey City and several other locations around the state. The campaign focuses on mourning the victims of the September 11 attacks while mobilizing against US military actions that result in the further loss of innocent lives.

PEACE ACTION—GREATER HOUSTON CHAPTER

Houston, TX: $300.

This grant goes for a local anti-war alliance made up of Houston Nonviolent Action/War Resisters League, Peace Action-Greater Houston Chapter, and Pax Christi-Houston Chapter. This alliance has organized several vigils, continues to do weekly leafleting actions on Saturdays, and mobilized some 200 people for a Nov. 18 march and rally which got good coverage in the local media.

PEACE ACTION NEW MEXICO

Santa Fe, NM: $500.

This local Peace Action affiliate, founded in July 1998, responded to September 11 with a "Gathering for Peaceful Alternatives" in Santa Fe on Sept. 22, attended by some 300 local residents. On Oct. 27, the group sponsored an all-day Saturday "learn-in," attended by about 300 people, on the subject of "Understanding 9/11 and Beyond."

PEACE ACTION OF WASHINGTON

Seattle, WA: $500.

Peace Action of Washington has successfully organized educational events featuring local Muslim Afghani immigrant women as speakers. These events draw overflow crowds in rural areas, small towns and college campuses across Washington state. The group has also been distributing leaflets and gathering signatures on petitions calling for "justice, not violence."

PEACE ACTION WISCONSIN

Milwaukee, WI: $500.

This group held vigils every Tuesday from September through mid-November, and has organized several well-attended educational events, mostly at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus. A Nov. 12 teach-in on the theme of "Palestine, Afghanistan and the Current World Crisis," co-sponsored by the local Student Peace Action Network (SPAN) chapter, drew 400-500 people.

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER

San Francisco, CA: $500.

This grant went for printing the biweekly SF Indymedia News Sheet—now also produced in Spanish—and organizing anti-war video screenings. Ongoing public screenings have featured such videos as "9.11" (produced by Paper Tiger TV in New York City) and "Stronger than Bombs," a local video featuring interviews with youth of color about the war.

STUDENTS TRANSFORMING AND RESISTING CORPORATIONS (STARC) ALLIANCE

Portland, OR: $500.

STARC Alliance has distributed about 150 teach-in packets to college campus organizers around the country, to help them set up local events as part of a national day of education. At least 50 campus groups organized teach-ins; dozens more organized smaller informational sessions and workshops. STARC is now planning a national conference for Feb. 2-3 in Cincinnati on the root causes of terrorism.

New Grants, July-November 2001

CORPORACION JORGE ARTEL

Cartagena, Colombia: $2,000.

The Jorge Artel Corporation is a nonprofit grassroots organization based in the African-descended communities on Colombia's Atlantic coast. This grant goes for the Civil Disobedience Training and Education Project, carrying out workshops and producing educational materials about the importance of civil disobedience as a form of nonviolent resistance to oppression. The Muste Institute has also agreed to act as fiscal sponsor for the Corporación Jorge Artel.

IZMIR WAR RESISTERS ASSOCIATION

Izmir, Turkey: $3,000 (INTF)

The Izmir War Resisters Association carries out trainings and educational work with political activists in Turkey, promoting the use of nonviolent action for social change. This grant from the Muste Institute's International Nonviolence Training Fund (INTF) went for a conference on "Peace and Women's Movement in Turkey: Practice and Ideology," to discuss nonviolent strategies for confronting militarism and sexism. Despite the events of Sept. 11—or perhaps because of them—even more people attended the conference in late September than were initially expected. Participants came from as far away as Korea, Colombia and Chile.

LONG ISLAND ALLIANCE FOR PEACEFUL ALTERNATIVES

Garden City, NY: $1,000.

Founded in 1985, the Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives is Long Island's largest peace organization, representing 22 organizations and over 1,000 members. In June 2000 the Alliance initiated United People for Social, Economic and Racial Justice (UPSERJ), a coalition of 50 community-based and religious organizations which work together on issues of racism and poverty affecting their communities. This grant goes for a program of outreach and educational empowerment, using the techniques of popular education and liberation theology to bring new activists and leaders into UPSERJ.

MEXICO SOLIDARITY NETWORK

Chicago, IL: $2,000.

Mexico Solidarity Network is a coalition of 88 organizations struggling for democracy, economic justice and human rights on both sides of the US-Mexico border. This grant goes toward hiring a grassroots organizer to lead workshops around the country on "Corporate Agenda vs. People's Agenda." The workshop curriculum, which has already been developed, uses popular education techniques to encourage analysis of and resistance to corporate globalization and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

PHILADELPHIA AREA JOBS WITH JUSTICE

Philadelphia, PA: $1,000.

Philadelphia's local Jobs with Justice chapter was founded in 1999. This grant goes for organizing rank and file union members, faith leaders and community groups to take action in support of workers who are struggling for economic justice and rights on the job. Philadelphia Area JwJ also works to educate members of the community about how the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) would affect workers.

SERVICIO PAZ Y JUSTICIA (SERPAJ)-AMERICA LATINA

Montevideo, Uruguay: $15,000 (SFE)

This grant from our special donor-directed fund, Sheilah's Fund East (SFE), goes for administration of the regional coordinating office of SERPAJ (Peace and Justice Service), a network of national organizations in 10 Latin American countries which promote education and nonviolent action for social justice. Coordination of the network rotates every few years to a different national chapter, each of which has its own orientation and focus, spanning such issues as human rights, the environment, labor rights, women's rights, indigenous rights and conscientious objection to military service.

NEW WEBSITE!

The A.J. Muste Memorial Institute has a new, updated website at www.ajmuste.org. Our old website address (at nonviolence.org/ajmuste) still works and now forwards you automatically to the new site, which we are finally able to keep updated, thanks to the efforts of our webmaster, Ed Hedemann. Check it out!

The A.J. Muste Memorial Institute makes small grants to groups doing nonviolent organizing for social change. Our next deadlines for proposals are February 19 and May 6, 2002. Guidelines are on our web site or available by mail or email (see below).

If you are making up your will, we hope you will consider leaving a bequest to the Muste Institute to ensure the continuation of our work in the future. A suggested simple wording to use in making bequests is: "I bequeath dollars ($_____) or percent of my estate to the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute, Inc., a charitable, not-for-profit organization located at 339 Lafayette Street, New York, New York, 10012, to be used for its general purposes." To discuss other types of bequests, such as those directed toward a specific purpose, write or call Murray Rosenblith, the Institute's Executive Director.

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